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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly describes a collaborative project between a special school and a middle school to enhance disability awareness. The project brought 7th graders from the middle school and students from the special school together for combined learning activities and gave 7th graders an opportunity to volunteer help with individual students and become a special student's "buddy." The project was implemented as part of a 7th grade social studies unit on prejudice and discrimination and involved about 1 hour of student time per month as well as joint staff planning. The paper provides information on project adaptability, time required, materials/cost, and outcomes/evaluation. (DB)

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"DIVERSITY AWARENESS THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE"

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DIVERSITY AWARENESS
THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE

DIVERSITY AWARENESS THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE is a cooperative learning agreement established between the Opportunity Training Center, a private, special purpose school for children with handicapping conditions and special needs, and seventh graders at Cunningham Middle School. By bringing our two schools together for combined learning activities and by providing our students time to do volunteer work with the students from O.T.C., the barriers that often exist between those with handicapping conditions and our students begin to fall.

ADAPTABILITY

DIVERSITY AWARENESS THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE could be easily adapted by any middle or high school in a community that has a school for children with special needs or a school that provides within the district but at a separate location from the mainstreamed students. We recommend as close to a one-to-one ratio as possible to create a "buddy system" among the students.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Successful implementation of the project requires some time to select and prepare students. Our first activity involves the social studies department. Students at the beginning of the year complete a unit on prejudice and discrimination. Their awareness is heightened by a historical examination of discrimination. Middle school students are deeply concerned with the concept of fairness and are eager to examine these issues. This leads naturally into a discussion of separation and discrimination against people with handicapping conditions. Students are encouraged to examine their own school and environment for accessibility and inclusion.

Once a basic awareness has been raised, speakers are brought in to discuss various handicapping conditions. The local director of the cooperating school visits with our students to introduce the project. The Pine Tree Society of Maine has been another resource used.

After the speakers, the students are encouraged to volunteer to take part in the next stage of the project--the school exchange and activities. Some of the activities that have been successful include:

- sports and art activities
- assisting in gym class and motor skill development
- one-to-one computer helpers

(writing and math)

- communication facilitators
- Special Olympics helpers
- participation on unified Special Olympics teams
- exchange of cards for birthdays and holidays
- social activities
- combined field trips and field days
- student volunteers to work as classroom helpers
- Christmas caroling and holiday celebrations
- attending school activities and sports events with their buddies

TIME REQUIRED

To be effective, approximately one hour of student involvement per month is needed. As the program develops, more time together naturally follows. Coordination between the two staffs will require regular monthly meetings to plan activities for the coming month.

MATERIALS/COST

Materials will vary depending on individual activities. This project can be implemented for little or no money

provided that already budgeted school supplies can be used. Most materials are standard school supplies such as paper, crayons, general art supplies, and gym equipment. Outside speakers' fees and food and drink for get-togethers should be budgeted for. Bus transportation costs will vary depending on the distance traveled to the school of the exchange.

OUTCOMES/EVALUATION

Through observation of the students, oral student feedback, and student journal writing, the project will:

- break down barriers between children with special needs and public school children
- prepare students for an integrated world
- teach the value of community service
- build student self esteem through helping others
- heighten student awareness of and value for individual differences
- help students to focus on capabilities rather than disabilities

CONCLUSION

One of the key goals of education is to break down the barriers that exist among people. **DIVERSITY AWARENESS THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE** is designed to create compassionate, caring students who are accepting of others and are nonjudgmental. Through community service and student exchanges, the students develop a greater awareness and understanding of the existence and the value of differences. The key to the project is interaction between the students of our school and the students from a school whose students have special needs. Our desire is to prepare our students for the integrated world in which they will live, instill in them an understanding of the value of community service, and to further the goal of "inclusion" within our schools.